STUDENTS’ SPEAKING SKILL IN ENGLISH IMMERSION SCHOOL
(A Case Study)

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ABSTRACT
This research aims to describe: (1) students’ English speaking skill in English immersion school; (2) students’ strengths and weaknesses in speaking skill in English immersion school; (3) factors affecting students’ speaking skill in English immersion school. The research was designed as a case study, conducted at a school applying English immersion in Bondowoso, East Java, Indonesia in Academic Year 2017-2018. The research used purposive sampling. Data were collected by interview, questionnaire, observation, and document analysis. The informants were grade 2 students, English teachers, and the school founder. It was found that: (1) on the scale of 1-5 (1=very bad, 2=bad, 3=fair, 4=good, 5=very good), students’ English speaking skills were at levels of very good (2.22%), good (6.67%), fair (37.78%), bad (44.44%), and very bad (8.89%); (2) students’ strengths in English speaking skills were related to vocabulary with average score of 2.7, and the weaknesses dealt with fluency with average score of 2.25; (3) factors that were assumed to affect students’ English speaking skills were environment, local accent, vocabulary mastery, English use, preference, and habits. It is recommended that all parties involved in the English immersion program evaluate the running of the program and the content of the program to provide learning outputs through English immersion. Commitment to using English should be strengthened, especially in English Week program. Improvement on English teachers’ is needed by involving them in trainings. Finally, similar research at non-English immersion school is necessary to ensure the comparative results gained from both types of school.

Key Words: Speaking Skills, English Immersion, ELT, case study
INTRODUCTION

One of the major goals of the English teaching in Indonesia is to equip students with speaking skill in English. Through the teaching of the English subject in class, it is expected that students are able to develop communicative skill either orally or in written form, possess awareness of the importance and essence of English to improve their competitiveness in global community, and to expand students understanding of the relationship between language and culture (Permendikbud No. 22/2006).

Oradee (2012) argues that the teaching of English at schools is aimed at enabling students to use English for communication and as a tool for furthering their studies. Thus, the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are simultaneously performed. Of those skills, speaking is considered the most important skill as it is the foundation in communication. Cregan (in Tanni and Raba, 2015) believes that speaking is the language skill which comes first in human’s young age and is the most essential and most often used in communication. Besides, it is the major tool for intermediating cultures through which children put and identify themselves in the world.

The improvement of speaking in EFL context should be part of teachers’ concern. Providing situations where learners can engage their speaking skill in real contexts is an effective way to enable students to increase their speaking ability. Richards (in Haidara, 2016) argues that improvement in learners’ spoken language ability is an important part of evaluation of learners’ success in an English language teaching program.

Despite the high attention to the development of language classroom teaching, the wider side of learners’ life is another essential part in language teaching. Larsari (2011) argues that notwithstanding teachers’ great efforts to apply approaches concerning with the meaning and language use, it is undeniable that learners’ language performance is not quite satisfactory. EFL teachers are actually in need of ways to improve learners’ language performance not only in classroom but also out of classroom.

One reasonable way to succeed students’ learning is through an English immersion in both curricular and non-curricular programs. This is to provide students with a situation where they can use their English in natural settings. Rugasken and Harris (2009) found English immersion program significant in improving students’ English skills. Rivers (1989: 15) exemplifies types of foreign language immersion programs such as study-abroad programs (especially in home-stay situations), ethnic festivals, and language camps with native speakers. This implies that out-of-classroom English immersion should be prioritized. If applied in classroom, however, English immersion may have some limitations in its practice such as dependability on the teacher’s knowledge, lack of materials and situational contexts, and contradictions in terms of time for grammatical materials lessons and real conversational skills (Rugasken and Harris, 2009).

English immersion is closely related to English skill development, especially speaking. Wenli (2005) points out that speaking is the most observable activity in a language classroom. Furthermore, the existence of at least two individuals in a conversation creates interactive activities (CEFR, 2011). In this case, English immersion provides the place where learners can set up conversational activities with
others. Therefore, speaking skill development is the major issue in managing an English immersion program.

In language development, speaking skill is considered important in a communication. It is a part of communicative activities which enable and require learners to speak with and listen to others as well as with people in a particular community in order to obtain information, break down barriers, talk about themselves, and learn about culture (CAL, 2008: 41). Littlewood (1995:6) elaborates the characteristics of learners’ ability in communicative activities: (1) They have sufficient linguistic skills; (2) They are able to differentiate between the linguistic forms they master and communicative functions they use; (3) They can deliver meanings effectively in the real situations; (4) They have good knowledge of social meanings contained in language forms.

The establishment of situation outside classroom where students engage the whole practice of English is based on the fact the time allotment of the English teaching as a foreign language at school is still far from the whole time used outside the classroom. The duration of English subject is given in range of 4-6 lesson hours per week either at junior or senior schools. This is due to the fact that English is used as a foreign language which sounds unfamiliar to Indonesian people. The long duration may help the teaching of English run smoothly for the appropriate mastery of English. However, the high demand of English proficiency at all fields nowadays requires longer exposure of English outside the classroom. Therefore, it is important to facilitate students with such a program where they can have the whole use of English in real situation.

Ideally, the provision of natural language situation where learners can use a foreign language should be based on original settings of the language such as home-stay or language camps with native speakers. However, such programs find constraints in terms of funding. Though it seems to be a technical problem, many schools in Indonesia consider such programs expensive. Thus, it is not easy to apply the programs in all schools. Only those facilitated with high funding can implement the programs. In order to cope with these constraints, particular schools set seemingly promising programs which combine the situation where English is used in real context but in non-English culture. This is a moderate way to make learners find the real language situation.

English immersion program is an answer to deal with this situation. This opens a wider opportunity to students to be more communicative in English, especially on how speaking skill is built up in this program. An intensive investigation will possibly give a great contribution to the program improvement. For this reason, this research is conducted focusing on students’ speaking skill in English speaking at the school. This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. How is students’ speaking skill in English immersion school?
2. In what aspects do students have strengths and weaknesses in English speaking in English immersion school?
3. What factors affect students’ speaking skill in English immersion school?

METHODS

This research would investigate a small setting in building up speaking skill through English immersion at an Islamic Senior High School (Madrasah) in Bondowoso, East Java, Indonesia. The research was designed as a case-study and concerned with qualitative data. Merriam (in Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:62) points out
that a case-study is an examination of one setting or a single subject, a single depository document, or one particular event that is carried out in a detailed context. The fundamental steps applied were:

- formulating research paradigm, which covers scientific paradigm that is stated from literatures and experts’ view on the research problems;
- stating data resources and research area;
- collecting data;
- checking the accuracy of data (triangulation).

The key informants in this research were those who were involved in English immersion such as students, supervisors of English immersion, English teachers, and the principal. Through an open-ended, in-depth interview, each of them was expected to provide information about the running of English immersion. The topics of interview are listed on separate sheets. The data gained from the English teachers and English immersion supervisors covered all processes of English test and students’ interactions in English.

Data were collected by interview, questionnaire, documentation, and observation. Both qualitative and quantitative were analyzed by interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994: 21-23) which consists of data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion and verification as described below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students’ Speaking Skills in English Immersion school

Students’ English speaking skill refers to the student’s ability to perform oral activities in English language. The evaluation of this skill was based on two types of measurement: examiners’ perspectives based on test that had been conducted and students’ performance in social setting where the English speaking skills existed. Examiners’ perspectives were expressed through the scoring made by the examiners on the scoring sheet provided. Furthermore, English speaking performance was analyzed through social settings in which students showed their oral ability. The settings were the places where students usually gathered such as school canteen, dining room, mosque, and dorm terrace to do various activities like buying some snacks, eating meal, studying, etc.

Based on examiners’ evaluation, 45 grade-2 students’ speaking skills were at levels of very good (2.22%), good (6.67%), fair (37.78%), bad (44.44%), and very bad (8.89%). The following are the details of teachers’ evaluation on students’ speaking skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Male N</th>
<th>Male %</th>
<th>Female N</th>
<th>Female %</th>
<th>Total N</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.56</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>37.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.33</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31.11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Very bad</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>66.67</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on Tables 4.1 and 4.2, most of students (82.22%) view that their English speaking skills are fair. However, according to examiners’ evaluation, students’ English speaking skills are mostly bad (44.44%). This is in contrast with the situation in English immersion program where it was expected that the situation provided an ideal circumstance for students’ English speaking improvement.

Based on observation, in most practices of English among male students, students responded to an English conversation in various ways. Students with good ability in English answered any utterance in English properly, despite the incorrect grammar or pronunciation. Indeed, the conversations were running smoothly. However, only a few students did the responses in this way. They were from various grades, especially upper grades, and were the ones considered to have superior English ability.

Meanwhile, students with low English ability responded to an English conversation by some ways, such as showing no response, responding by gestures, responding through simple expressions, speaking in their own language, improper responses, avoidance, and letting another student respond to the conversation. All of these ways were to manage their lack of confidence due to minimum English ability.

**Student’s Strengths and Weaknesses in English Speaking Skills**

Based on examiners’ evaluation, male students’ strengths in English speaking skills relied on vocabulary and comprehension with average score 2.6 for each, and the weaknesses dealt with fluency with average score 2.1. Meanwhile, female students’ strengths in English speaking were on pronunciation with average score 2.9, and the weaknesses were on grammar and comprehension with average score 2.3 for each. Overall, all students’ strengths in English speaking skills related to vocabulary with average score 2.7, and the weaknesses dealt with fluency with average score 2.25. The details are presented on the table below.

**Table 2. Examiners’ Evaluation on Students’ English Speaking Skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the scores of both strengths and weaknesses for each criterion are in the range between 2 and 3, which means that the levels are in the range between “bad” and “fair”.

English immersion program of the school, respresented by English Week, provided the situations where students had opportunities to practice their English. In addition, some inputs in English, such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, could possibly be given in such situations. In majority, students were involved in some formal activities which were held regularly during the week, namely vocabulary enrichment, face-to-face conversation and public speaking. Vocabulary enrichment and face-to-face conversation were available on Tuesday while public speaking existed on Sunday. This is to show that both students’ strengths and weaknesses in English can be managed through the programs. The details of each program are presented on the next sub-chapter.
Factors Affecting Students’ English Speaking Skills in English Immersion School

Based on questionnaires, there are some factors that students assumed to affect their English speaking skills, such as environment, local accent, vocabulary mastery, English use, preference, and habits. The details are presented on the table below.

Table 3. Students’ Responses on Factors Affecting Their English Speaking Skill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Factors Affecting English Speaking Skill</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Local accent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vocabulary mastery</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>English use</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Preference</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Habits</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vocabulary mastery is one factor that, according to most students (37.78%), affected their English speaking skills. In fact, this is one important aspect in measuring one’s English speaking ability.

The second most important factor that students assumed to affect their English speaking skills was English use. This is dealing with the opportunities where the students could use English in their daily communication, especially through oral activities.

English was expected to be used at the school environment under control of teachers and student board. Therefore, in school there are some situations where students use their English in communication.

Another factor that determines students’ English speaking skills is local accent. It mostly happens to students from regions with particular regional language. Strong accent of local language that students have will most possibly affect pronunciation in English. The strong accent of local language still happened in students’ daily conversation.

Preference deals with feeling of happiness to use English in daily conversations. It strongly affects students’ English speaking ability due to independence to learn and use English in any situation. It is considered the factor that naturally influences students’ speaking ability in English.

Furthermore, habit is another important thing in building up students’ English speaking skill. Therefore, in English immersion program, the school sets the situation where students communicate in English, and there was punishment for those who did not use English in their conversations. This is part of conditioning to push students to use English, despite the low English ability. Indeed, students find habit useful for increasing their English ability.

English immersion, which is reflected through forceful English Week either in class or outside the class, is a way to set up situations where students are engaged in natural English atmosphere. This program is expected to provide English environment which enables students to improve their English ability, especially speaking skills. Not only do students practice oral conversations, they also can enrich some language features that support their English speaking ability such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. In addition, some factors that students assumed to affect their English speaking skills, i.e. environment, local accent, vocabulary mastery, use of English, preference, and habit, can be facilitated in the program. The environment can be established by strong rule of English use. Therefore, habit can be formed naturally.
Inside the program, vocabulary and pronunciation can be enriched through some activities. Preference is also facilitated for students to gain better learning situations. Based on interview, in addition to forcing students to use English in their daily activities, English Week contains some activities to support students’ mastery of English. The whole activities in English Week can be described in diagram below.

The concept of forceful English use among students through English Week seems ideal to accelerate students’ mastery of English. There is an obligation to use English in daily conversations, and punishment will be given for those who do not follow the rule. By such treatment, students willy-nilly follow the rule, and therefore the situations for English conversation are established. If it exists everyday, then students will succeed in English mastery.

However, such concept does not run well on the field. Most students do not prefer to use English in their daily communication. Instead, they like to use Arabic language better. Even though it is the time for English Week, in practice most of them use Arabic language which is more understandable to them. The rule for English use is not upheld properly, and the punishment is not strictly given to those who violated. Arabic language is, indeed, the major language taught at the school. This condition leads to unequal use between Arabic language and English. In daily conversations, the use of Arabic language seems more dominant than that of English. Most students prefer using Arabic language to English, even in the time of English Week.

The dominant mastery and use of Arabic language and lack of English teachers make the English immersion run improperly. The expected situation in English immersion is that students have better learning situations where they not only gain English inputs such as grammar, pronunciation, vocabularies, etc. but also use them properly. Even there has been a shift in orientation from providing students with good English to prioritizing their courage and confidence in speaking.

Based on description of findings above, what happened to students’ English speaking skills in English immersion school the school leads to a question on how the English immersion program is managed at the school. By English immersion, students have been facilitated with a number of activities, either formal or informal, that help students accelerate their English mastery, especially in speaking. Those activities, such as public speaking, forceful English use, vocabulary enrichment, grammar input, face-to-face conversation, are expected to facilitate learning for students. Besides, the strict rule on English practice possibly helps them establish situations where they can use their English in social setting. This is strengthened with punishment for those who violate the rule. The institution has determined this rule as its policy. Conceptually, this is an ideal management of English immersion program at school.

However, as the program did run as expected, a number of factors were assumed to influence the implementation of this program. Based on the research findings, some problems existed in the application of the program. There are three types of problems: personal, social, and institutional.

Personal problems deal with students’ self-preparedness in getting involved in the program. This includes students’ knowledge, motivation, independence, and confidence. As suggested by Tuan and Mai (2015), factors affecting speaking performance include affective factors e.g. motivation, self-confidence and anxiety), topical knowledge and feedback during speaking activities. Furthermore, Jindathai (2015) argues that the factors influencing speaking performance in English speaking are attitude, motivation, personality (e.g. extroversion/introversion, shyness, willingness to
participate in English speaking). Those factors potentially open possibilities for students to study and get involved in any situation where English use is available.

Social problems relate to the establishment of English atmosphere for students. These problems require situations of English use not only in classroom where teachers play an important role but also outside classroom situations where students interact with their counterparts. The two areas can positively work together to enable students to use English in their daily communications. Exposure to English situations is undeniable in this context, either in classroom or outside the classroom. As pointed out by Riyaz and Mullick (2016), some factors affecting English speaking skill are limited chance to speak English either in classroom or outside, minimum exposure to real English language situations that give them opportunities to practice English for communication and expression. This needs strong commitment to all members of the community where English immersion is established, in this case the school. As revealed in the findings, the commitment was not strongly made among members, either teachers, senior students and fellow students. Some external factors occurred in the school social environment, such as less consistent use of English, lack of examples from the senior students and the teachers, who mostly preferred using Arabic language to English.

Institutional problems deal with willingness and commitment of the founder/principal to renew and revise some policies that did not work effectively to build an ideal environment where English use is fully possible. In this case, improvement for English teachers’ quality and quantity is urgent to reach. Trainings on improving their quality are badly needed. The setting of the English environment needs to be held in order to facilitate students with learning situations where they can learn independently. In this case, the provision of media by which students can learn better is essential. Lack of facilities such as the Internet connection, audio and video facilities makes students find it difficult to access information that deals with English learning through online websites, etc. Besides, enhancement in the management of English immersion through English Week is another important thing to provide better learning situations. In this case, the content of the program needs improvement in terms of planning, implementation and evaluation. Planning deals with the core content of the program such as English inputs on vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. Implementation relates to focusing on students’ achievement and outputs indicated by better use of English in daily conversations. Finally, evaluation is made to analyze the effectiveness of particular activities in enhancing students’ speaking skills. This is to deal with management in ELT and provision of better exposure to English (e.g. opportunities to use English), and management in ELT (e.g. teacher) as suggested by Jindathai (2015). By synergizing the improvement in the three areas (personal, social, institutional), it is expected that the English immersion program go in line with public expectation and therefore increase public trust in the school institution.

CONCLUSION

Students’ English speaking skill in English immersion school did not run in line with expectation in the school where this research was conducted. Ideally, English immersion program provides improvement in students’ English ability, including speaking skill. Indeed, some problems were found in the management of English immersion program and constrained the implementation of the problems. The problems are categorized as personal, social, and institutional problems. All parties involved in
the problem need to work together on managing the problems. In this case, the institution is necessary to manage the problems and coordinate all parties to deal with the problems. Personal problems need teachers’ and managers’ involvement in improving confidence, motivation, reducing shyness, improving willingness to participate in the program and other factors dealing with affective matters. Social problems can be managed by strengthening commitment in valuing the program. Institutional problems need willingness and commitment of the founder/principal to improve English teachers’ quality and provide facilities such as Internet connection and audio-video learning aids.

In line with the conclusion and implication, suggestions are in need of attention from the following parties such as founder/principal, teachers, students, researchers. Founder/principal needs to consider the possibility of managing problems with the involved parties, including teachers, students, and parents. This is to deal with some consequences that possibly appear in making improvement on either quality or quantity of teachers, facilities, etc. Teachers, especially English teachers, need to evaluate the running of the program and the content of the program to provide learning outputs through English immersion. Students should revitalize commitment to using English, especially in English Week program, and building up common awareness in improving the quality of the program. As this research focuses on English speaking skills in English immersion school, it is important to conduct other similar research on non-English immersion school. This is to ensure the comparative results gained from both types of school.

REFERENCES


